



MARCH 15, 1956



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Toward a Presidential Primary System?

PRESIDENTIAL primary laws, together with initiative, referendum, recall, and popular election of United States Senators, were part of the early 20th century movement for greater direct citizen participation in government. Primaries are designed to give the citizen a chance to help choose his party's candidates.

The first state presidential primary law, enacted in Wisconsin in 1905, provided for direct election of "unpledged" delegates to the party conventions. Delegates were free to vote for any nominee. Five years later, Oregon instituted a presidential primary system and added a provision enabling voters to express a preference for candidates.

Situation This Year

Eighteen states, Alaska, and the District of Columbia are holding some kind of Republican and Democratic presidential primaries in 1956. The states are California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin. In addition, presidential primaries are optional in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia.

Presidential primary systems vary greatly from state to state:

(a) Some states provide for a slate of delegates (1) pledged to vote for a certain candidate until he releases them or receives less than a minimum percentage of the total votes at convention, usually 10 per cent, or (2) unpledged.

(b) In some states, delegates run as individuals, (1) pledged in some cases, (2) unpledged in others.

(c) Voters in some states elect delegates to district or state conventions which elect delegates to the national convention.

(d) Preferential polls give the voter an opportunity to indicate which presidential nominee he wishes as the candidate of his party. (1) In several states, delegates are not bound by the results of the preferential poll and may vote as they choose. (2) In other states, delegates must follow the wishes of the voters until released as described above.

(e) A few states elect (1) some delegates by the primary method and (2) other delegates at state party conventions.

(f) (1) Some states require a candidate's consent to enter his name in the primary. (2) A few states do not require his consent but allow him to withdraw his name if it is entered. A candidate may thus choose not to risk defeat, and the voters may be denied the opportunity of making a realistic choice among potential candidates.

Confusing, isn't it?

What Does It All Mean?

Because of the lack of a common denominator, it is difficult to evaluate the importance to the voter of the existing presidential primary systems. Yet primaries are of country-wide significance as a sounding board for potential candidates. They may build up some who do not have their party's organization support. They sometimes contribute to the elimination of a candidate from the race if he suffers a drastic defeat early in the primary season.

If primaries, including preferential polls, are held far in advance of conventions, before all candidates have announced, party members may not have the opportunity to choose from the entire field of candidates.

Pledging delegates for a favorite son may keep a state uncommitted on major candidates. The favorite son later may release the delegates to

vote for another candidate not necessarily approved by the voters.

Frequent attempts have been made to establish a more uniform, nationwide, presidential primary system. Because election procedures fall within the province of the states rather than the federal government, an amendment to the federal Constitution probably would be necessary. Several resolutions for an amendment have been introduced in the present Congress but none has reached either floor.

One Way to Do It

Senator Douglas (D., Ill.) and Representative Bennett (D., Fla.) have introduced bills "encouraging" states to set up presidential primary systems. The bills propose that the federal government reimburse each state for its expenses in connection with its presidential primaries. To qualify, a state must have a presidential primary which (1) is held between April 1 and July 21; (2) is a "closed" primary in which only registered members of a party may vote in the primary of that party. Wisconsin and Minnesota now have "open" primaries in which anyone may vote in either primary (but not both); (3) provides that delegates be pledged to support the candidate preferred by their constituents until released by the candidate or until he receives less than 10 per cent of the convention votes on the first ballot, 20 per cent on the third, or 30 per cent on the fifth. The Douglas-Bennett proposal further provides for national certification of primary candidates. A candidate's consent is not required but he may withdraw his name and thus not appear on any state presidential primary ballots.

These bills have been referred to the appropriate committees in the Senate and House and no hearings have been held.



FROM THE
**PRESIDENT'S
DESK**

IN 1919, at the Jubilee Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its founding, Carrie Chapman Catt proposed the formation of the League of Women Voters and described the "great need to be met by the new organization if it adopted a program of nonpartisan political education and leadership."

Later, in January 1920, Mrs. Catt wrote in *The Woman Citizen*: "The League of Women Voters believes, and will act upon the belief, that the real spirit of America is not bounded by the horizon of any one political party nor any one political creed. In other words, the League believes, and will act upon the belief, that political parties were meant to be the tools of government—not its masters."

In April 1921, Mrs. Maud Wood Park, first national President, declared to the second annual Convention: "The League can scarcely fail to develop in its members a saving sense that the saints are not all in one party and the sinners in another, and a steadfast determination to see that their own party, whatever it may be, follows its real statesmen."

In the early days it was evident that if the Suffrage Association allied itself with any one political party or indeed with any one group, the prospects of winning the support of many groups would be diminished. Throughout the years of work for suffrage it was also evident that, to be fully effective, voters must join the political party of their choice and work within it.

Thus the League was born nonpartisan, continued to be nonpartisan, and will preserve its nonpartisanship with the greatest of care. At the same time, the League continually urges participation by its members, as individuals, in the political parties as a necessary part of citizenship.

As the national political campaign gets under way, it will be increasingly im-

portant that the nonpartisan character of the League be safeguarded with vigilance. This means that all those who represent the League in the public eye must choose between League and party work. The pressures and temptations to do both will no doubt be great, but choices must be made.

The local League Board is responsible for ultimate decisions in determining whether a proposed activity by a Board member jeopardizes the League's nonpartisanship. Members who do not officially represent the League are not in any way restricted in their political activities as long as they do not use the name of the League.

It is to be hoped, of course, that throughout the campaign all members will see the contribution the League can make through its Voters Service work as a vitally important factor in developing informed and active participation of citizens in government.

Ruby Maxim Lee

The Story of the Trade Surveys

SURVEYS of the local effects of foreign trade have been almost completed by 517 Leagues in 41 states. Interviews have been conducted with 10,660 manufacturing concerns, farmers, farm organizations and agencies, port authorities, miners, and transportation officials. Of the surveys, 13 were conducted on a state basis, 149 on either a congressional district or community basis. It is expected that a summary of the work done, with some evaluation of its educational value and the story of what the interviewers discovered, will be published for early release.

In the meantime, five League members recently summarized before the House Ways and Means Committee the findings of surveys in which they had participated. On March 8, during hearings on H.R. 5550, the bill to authorize U.S. membership in the Organization for Trade Cooperation, League witnesses told why the surveys were undertaken and what had been learned.

Mrs. Oscar M. Ruebhausen of the national Board, in introducing the other four witnesses, said: "In order to gain understanding of new developments in trade as well as to analyze present conditions, the League undertook these surveys. The surveys have stimulated so much interest and have such an important bearing on your decisions regarding OTC that we have asked four local League leaders to tell you what they found."

These witnesses were: Mrs. Don-

ald P. Kennett, who discussed the St. Louis metropolitan area survey; Mrs. Charles G. Benson, who told of the Clark County (Ga.) survey and mentioned other surveys made in Georgia; Mrs. Homer W. Ohlhaver, who presented the Illinois state survey, and Mrs. F. W. Hopkins, who gave details of the surveys made in nine New Jersey Congressional Districts.

These surveys were filed with the Committee. The witnesses were congratulated by the Chairman, Rep. Jere Cooper (D., Tenn.) "for the contribution the League has made to this important issue."

Copies of the testimony are available at 5¢ for each statement, or 15¢ for all five.

★ CONGRESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT ★

A new version of **S. J. Res. 1**† (Bricker Amendment) proposing a constitutional amendment to limit the President's treaty-making powers, was reported to the Senate by the Judiciary Committee March 5 and will be placed on the Senate Calendar as soon as the Committee report is published. The new wording, sponsored by Sen. Dirksen (R., Ill.), states that "a provision of a treaty or other international agreement which conflicts with any provision of this Constitution shall not be of any force or effect," and that the Senate shall advise and consent to ratification of treaties by roll call votes.

† Indicates League opposition.

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